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**Items for information: environment statistics**

# Revision of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics

## Progress report of the Secretary-General

*Summary*

The present report was prepared at the request of the Statistical Commission at its forty-first session (see E/2010/24, chap. I.A). It summarizes the progress made by the Expert Group in the revision of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics established by the United Nations Statistics Division. The report describes the steps implemented since the forty-first session and summarizes the main conclusions and recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting held in New York from 8 to 10 November 2010. It also describes the way forward in 2011.

* E/CN.3/2011/1.

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# I. Introduction

1. At its forty-first session, the Statistical Commission discussed the report of the Secretary-General on the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (E/CN.3/2010/9).

2. The Commission:

(a) Recognized the importance of environment statistics and congratulated the Expert Group on its excellent work and report;

(b) Acknowledged that the 1984 *Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics* has been a useful framework in many countries for the development of environment statistics;

(c) Endorsed the programme of work for the revision of the *Framework* and the development of a core set of environment statistics;

(d) Cautioned that the current efforts related to the revision of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) should not be diluted;

(e) Emphasized, with regard to the guiding principles for the revision, the need to:

(i) Engage all stakeholders, including the scientific community, in the process;

(ii) Ensure complementarity with the SEEA;

(iii) Use caution when considering the ecosystem approach or other policy frameworks as the conceptual foundation for the revised *Framework*;

(iv) Provide supporting methodological guidance and best practices within a reasonable time following the revision of the *Framework*;

(f) Recommended, with regard to the proposed contents of the revised *Framework*; that higher visibility be given to the need for institutional coordination and cooperation, and work that has been done at the regional level;

(g) Asked the United Nations Statistics Division to develop a more realistic timetable, in consultation with countries and other stakeholders;

(h) Noted the importance of greater involvement by the Interseeretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics in the development of the *Framework*;

(i) Welcomed the interest and the willingness of countries and agencies to contribute to this work and participate in the planned expert group;

(j) Welcomed the proposal by the United Nations Statistics Division to develop a website that would serve as a knowledge base for country practices on environment statistics (see E/2010/24, decision 41/107).

3. The present report describes: (a) progress made since the forty-first session of the Statistical Commission by summarizing the steps that have been implemented in 2010; (b) the conclusions of the first meeting of the Expert Group on the revision of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics; and (c) the way forward.

## II. Progress made in 2010

4. In accordance with the decision of the Statistical Commission, the Statistics Division formally convened the Expert Group (see E/CN.3/2010/9, para. 33). In addition to the experts who attended the preparatory meeting in November 2009, the Group includes experts from countries and bodies that expressed an interest in participating in the revision process, including the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics and the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting. The Expert Group represents 23 countries and 11 international, regional, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and specialized bodies.

5. The Statistics Division drafted and circulated the following documents to the members of the Expert Group:

- The terms of reference of the Expert Group
- A detailed programme of work with outputs, responsibilities and timelines
- A first provisional annotated outline of the revised Framework
- A list of issues for discussion

6. These documents were revised on the basis of the comments received from the Expert Group. The members were also requested to submit papers on the discussion topics identified in the list of issues.

7. Ms. Iva Ritschelova, President of the Czech Statistical Office, and Mr. Rusman Heriawan, Director General of Statistics Indonesia, accepted the invitation of the Statistics Division to act as co-chairs of the Expert Group and oversee the revision process.

8. The first Expert Group Meeting on the Revision of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics, organized by the Division, was held in New York from 8 to 10 November 2010.

9. The agenda of the meeting was developed on the basis of the draft annotated outline of the revised Framework and the issue papers contributed by the members of the Expert Group.

10. The meeting was attended by 29 experts from Australia, Austria, Belize, Botswana, Brazil, Canada, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, India, Italy, Jamaica, Mauritius, Mexico, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, the Philippines, Suriname, the United Arab Emirates, the United States of America, the European Environment Agency, Eurostat, the World Resources Institute, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Economic Commission for Africa, the Development Policy and Analysis Division of the United Nations Secretariat, and the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting. The experts from Bangladesh, Indonesia, the European Commission Joint Research Centre, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Institute for Sustainable Development could not participate in the meeting.

11. The objectives of the Expert Group Meeting were to: (a) reach agreement on a scientific theory that could underpin a conceptual framework for environment

statistics; (b) discuss and, if possible, conclude on the issues presented in the issue papers; (c) finalize the outline of the revised Framework and agree on the general contents of its chapters; (d) agree on the process to establish the core set of environment statistics; and (e) finalize the terms of reference of the Expert Group and the detailed programme of work for 2011.

12. The meeting was organized to comprise the following five sessions:

- Session 1 on the nature of environment statistics (plenary)
- Session 2 on the framework for environment statistics (plenary)
- Session 3 on the core set of environment statistics (plenary)
- Session 4 on the outline of the revised Framework (working groups and plenary)
- Session 5 on conclusions and the work programme (plenary)

13. The discussions were based on 16 issue papers and 6 papers on country practices contributed by the Expert Group. All papers and presentations submitted for the Expert Group Meeting are available and can be downloaded from the Expert Group's website at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/environment/fdes.htm.

14. The main conclusions and recommendations of the meeting are summarized in paragraphs 15 to 22 of the present report. A summary of the way forward is given in paragraph 23. The full report of the Expert Group Meeting, the terms of reference and the programme of work have been submitted to the Statistical Commission as background documents.

## III. Main conclusions and recommendations of the first Expert Group Meeting on the Revision of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics

15. The Expert Group concluded that there has not yet been agreement on a single scientific theory upon which the framework for environment statistics could be based. While an agreed scientific theory provides a strong and sound foundation for a conceptual framework, it is not a precondition for beginning the process of revising the 1984 Framework. While the Expert Group deliberates on what scientific theory can best support the conceptual framework, work towards the revision of the Framework and the establishment of a core set of environment statistics must start. It was therefore agreed that work should progress in two parallel processes which should be merged once options for the conceptual framework have been identified and agreed upon by the Expert Group.

16. The Expert Group invited the Statistics Division to initiate the process of revising the 1984 Framework and developing a core set of environment statistics. This work should be guided by the agreed scope and criteria, and should focus on an analysis of the structure and components of the 1984 Framework, identifying and developing the dimensions, building blocks and statistical topics that are not, or not fully, covered by the Framework. The extensive analysis and assessment of country practices, existing regional and international indicator sets, data requirements created by major international environmental conventions and agreements, and new initiatives on measuring green economy and well-being should continue and feed

into the revision of the Framework and should provide the basis for the identification of a core set of environment statistics. A subgroup should be formed by members of the Expert Group to help the Statistics Division in this work.

17. The Expert Group also invited Statistics Canada to further elaborate on its proposal to apply the natural capital theory to developing a conceptual framework for environment statistics, and illustrate the dimensions, structure and contents (statistical topics) of the resulting framework. It was requested that other scientific theories that could underpin a conceptual framework for environment statistics should also be explored, taking into account the Framework and the criteria for a framework agreed upon by the Expert Group. It was suggested that a subgroup be formed by interested Expert Group members to assist Statistics Canada in this work. Once the subgroup has identified options for the conceptual framework, they will be presented to the full Expert Group for discussion.

18. The Statistics Division was requested to put into operation the electronic discussion forum set up on the Expert Group's website to facilitate discussion of interim documents. It was recommended that the discussion should engage a wider spectrum of experts, including the representatives of the scientific and the user community.

19. The Expert Group requested the subgroup led by the Statistics Division to submit the following documents for the next meeting of the Expert Group in May 2011:

- A working paper on the revision of the 1984 Framework containing an analysis of its structure and components, and identifying and developing the dimensions, building blocks and statistical topics that are not, or not fully, covered
- A first draft of the core set of environment statistics with the description of the process that was used for its establishment

20. The Expert Group also requested the subgroup led by Statistics Canada to prepare a working paper on the elaboration of the natural capital theory in terms of the dimensions, structure and contents (statistical topics) of a resulting conceptual framework and on the exploration of other scientific theories that could underpin a conceptual framework for environment statistics, which will be discussed at the next meeting of the Expert Group.

21. The Statistics Division was requested to finalize the terms of reference and the detailed programme of work of the Expert Group in accordance with the conclusions of the Expert Group Meeting and to present them, together with a progress report, for information, at the forty-second session of the Statistical Commission in February 2011.

22. The next meeting of the Expert Group will be held in New York from 4 to 6 May 2011.

## IV. The way forward

23. The following table contains the timeline of the revision of the Framework and the establishment of the core set of environment statistics, the expected outputs and responsibilities.

| *Deadline* | *Output* | *Responsibility* |
|---|---|---|
| 1 April 2011 | Working paper on the revision of the 1984 Framework (analysing the structure and components, identifying and developing the dimensions, building blocks and statistical topics that are not, or not fully, covered) | United Nations Statistics Division and subgroup |
| 1 April 2011 | A first draft of the core set of environment statistics with the description of the process that was used for its establishment | United Nations Statistics Division and subgroup |
| 1 April 2011 | Working paper on the elaboration of the natural capital theory in terms of the dimensions, structure and contents (statistical topics) of a resulting conceptual framework and on the exploration of other scientific theories that could underpin a conceptual framework for environment statistics | Canada and subgroup |
| 4-6 May 2011 | Second Expert Group Meeting | United Nations Statistics Division |
| 15 July 2011 | First draft of the revised Framework circulated to the Expert Group | United Nations Statistics Division, Statistics Canada |
| 15 July 2011 | Second draft of the core set of environment statistics circulated to the Expert Group | United Nations Statistics Division |
| 1 September 2011 | Comments received from Expert Group | Expert Group members |
| 15 September 2011 | Second draft of the revised Framework | United Nations Statistics Division, Statistics Canada |
| 15 September 2011 | Revised draft of the core set of environment statistics | United Nations Statistics Division |
| 30 September-31 October 2011 | Global consultation | United Nations Statistics Division |
| November 2011 | Third Expert Group Meeting (virtual) | United Nations Statistics Division |
| 10 December 2011 | Report and final drafts of the revised Framework and the core set of environment statistics for the forty-third session of the Statistical Commission | United Nations Statistics Division, Chairpersons |